

## CASE STUDY: SHOULD WE FOLLOW THE EUROPEAN MODEL?

Some “smart growth” activists have urged U.S. cities to model themselves after those in Europe, where, they claim, government policies limiting growth and encouraging transit ridership have resulted in reduced auto-dependence and little suburban development. However, Europeans are themselves abandoning the European model, turning toward car ownership and moving into the suburbs.

# CASE STUDY: SHOULD WE FOLLOW THE EUROPEAN MODEL?

## Background

Europe, with its higher population densities, greater public transit service, lower road capacity per capita, and higher fuel prices, offers an opportunity to examine many of the policies being proposed in the United States to alter transportation and development patterns. Many of these policies are being promoted as a way to reduce automobile dependence and discourage suburbanization. Recent trends in Europe suggest that these policies may actually prove ineffective in changing American lifestyle choices.

## The Myth

Land-use planning and heavy transit investments have produced low levels of dependence upon the automobile and little suburban development in Europe.

## The Facts

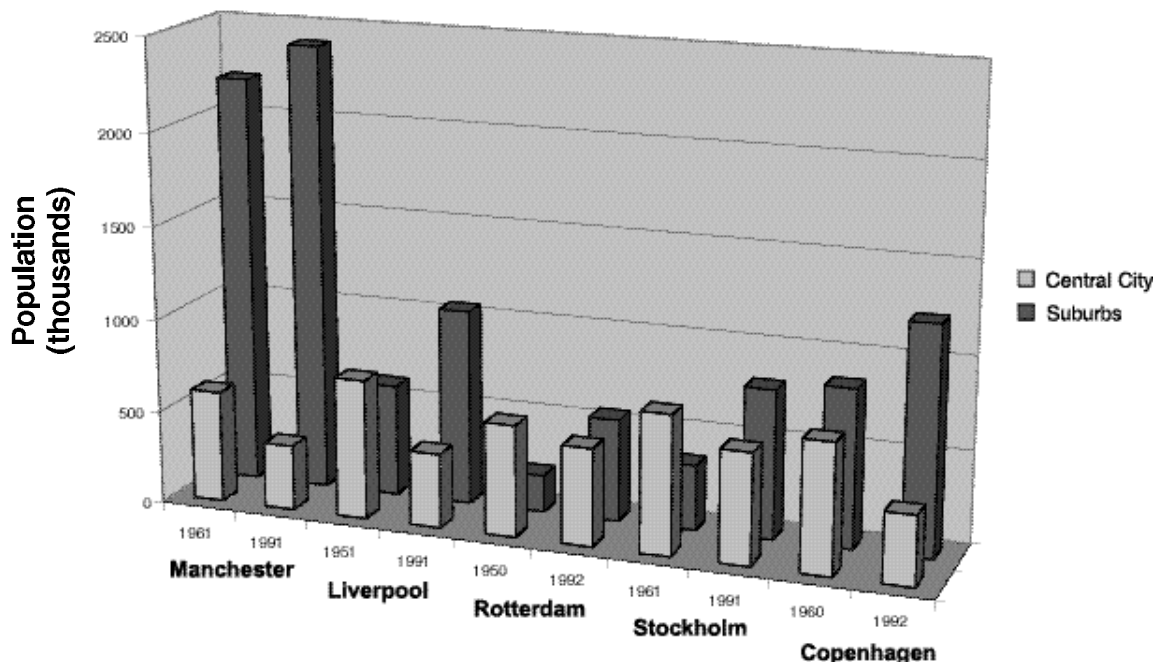
**As average incomes have risen over recent decades, Europeans are buying more cars and driving more.**

- European car ownership is increasing three times faster than it is in the United States, according to transportation analyst Wendell Cox (1999).
- Cox also found that despite the availability of public transit, 82 percent of all travel in the European Union is by car; 18 percent is by rail, bus, or trolley.

**Despite the efforts of planners, most European cities are rapidly decentralizing.**

- European inner-city populations are falling. Between 1950 and 1992, Amsterdam's central city population decreased 10 percent; between 1960 and 1992, Copenhagen's central city pop-

## Europe's Suburban Population is Growing



Source: Professor Genevieve Giuliano, University of Southern California

ulation fell 35 percent; between 1954 and 1991, Paris's central city population fell 27 percent; and between 1961 and 1991, Stockholm's central city population fell by 16 percent (Newman and Kenworthy (1989) with additional information supplied by Wendell Cox (1999)).

- Newman and Kenworthy also found that Europe's suburban populations are increasing. Between 1950 and 1992, Amsterdam's suburban population increased by 197 percent; between 1960 and 1992, Copenhagen's suburban population increased by 138 percent; between 1954 and 1991, Paris's suburban population increased by 105 percent; and between 1961 and 1991, Stockholm's suburban population increased by 164 percent (Cox 1999).
- In addition, Newman and Kenworthy's research showed that, as a result of the significant population decentralization occurring in Europe, a majority of people in many urban regions now live in the suburbs. By the early 1990s, 58 percent of Amsterdam's residents were suburban; 72 percent of Copenhagen's residents were suburban; 79 percent of Paris's residents were suburban; and 55 percent of Stockholm's residents were suburban.

## Our Position

Despite punitive taxes on motor vehicles and fuels (which make gas almost twice as expensive as it is in the United States), rules to discourage driving, and draconian land-use laws regulating suburban development, car ownership and suburban development are on the rise in Europe. As average incomes have risen over recent decades, Europeans are buying more cars and driving more. European car ownership is increasing three times faster than it is in the United States.

The concept of using anti-growth policies to force high-density living has simply not achieved its goal of keeping the citizens of the continent in central cities. Most European cities are rapidly decentralizing.

### Endnotes

Cox, Wendell. (1999). *Demographic Briefs and Urban Policy*.  
<[www.publicpurpose.com](http://www.publicpurpose.com)>.

Newman, Peter, and Jeff Kenworthy. (1989). *Cities and Automobile Dependence: An International Sourcebook*. Brookfield, VT: Gower Technical.